

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Albert W. Lackey House
OWNER: Suzanne Anderson
APPLICANT: Same as Owner
LOCATION: 239 Westheimer – Avondale Addition
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: Ic
HPO FILE NO.: 07PL41
DATE ACCEPTED: Feb-1-07
HAHC HEARING: Mar-14-07
PC HEARING: Mar-29-07

SITE INFORMATION:

Lot 18, Block 10, Avondale Addition, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, wood frame residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The house located at 239 Westheimer was the home of Albert Wesley Lackey, a real estate investor in Houston during the early 20th Century. He was also appointed the second Superintendent of Houston City Parks and worked to carry out many of the innovative plans first proposed by Arthur Comey, a noted landscape designer. The home was designed and constructed in late 1910 by the Russell Brown Company, a notable Houston and Dallas firm. Russell Brown was a builder of high end homes in Houston during the first quarter of the 20th century. Examples of this company's work may be seen elsewhere in Avondale, Broadacres, Montrose, South End, and Westmoreland. The home is one of the last remnants of the residential component of the Avondale Addition, which originally included homes also along Hathaway Avenue, now called Westheimer Road. The house meets Criteria 1, 4, 5, and 6 for designation as a Landmark and Protected Landmark.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Albert Wesley Lackey house is located at 239 Westheimer in the Avondale Addition, first platted in 1907, which originally included the 100, 200, and 300 blocks of Avondale, Stratford, and Hathaway (renamed Westheimer in 1960) Streets. Today, the eastern portion of Avondale, which includes the 100 blocks of Avondale and Stratford and the eastern half of the 200 block of Stratford, is designated as the Avondale East Historic District, one of eight historic districts thus far designated by City Council.

Albert W. Lackey was a native of Jackson County, Ohio, born in 1868. He was the second of three children born to Adam and Nancy Lackey, who lived in Bloomfield, Ohio. Adam Lackey was a county commissioner for Jackson County from 1866-1871. Albert's mother, Nancy Stephenson Lackey, was the daughter of a Jackson County judge.

Albert Lackey moved to Houston in 1910 with his two sisters, Permelia and Mary Lackey. The three siblings were enumerated in the same household in the 1910 census of Harris County. Permelia Lackey was aged 40 years and Mary was aged 60 years at that time. Albert Lackey was listed as 42 years of age and single. The Lackeys were boarders in a home in Houston's Third Ward when they first arrived in Houston, but would soon purchase the new home at 218 Hathaway (239 Westheimer) in January 1911.

Albert Lackey was involved in real estate during his first three years in Houston.

Since his parents were involved in civic matters back home, that must have influenced Lackey to get involved in civic matters as well in Houston. Lackey was appointed as General Superintendent of City Parks in 1915, succeeding Clarence L. Brock, its first superintendent. At this time Houston was in the initial phase of a mammoth undertaking regarding its future development and how the use of green space and parkland would be integrated into this plan.

According to the Protected Landmark Application for Sam Houston Park, it was Mayor H. Baldwin Rice, "in his annual report for 1909, who first 'urged prompt action be taken to acquire more parks and playgrounds since increasing property values would render appropriate sites too expensive for the city to obtain.' Rice demonstrated his commitment to the issue by appointing a Board of Park Commissioners in the spring of 1910. The commission was composed of Edwin B. Parker, an attorney and amateur horticulturist; George H. Hermann, a real estate investor and industrialist; and William H. Wilson, a real estate developer, who had developed the beautiful, tree-lined neighborhood of Woodland Heights. The board was to advise the Mayor and Council on the acquisition, development and maintenance of park property. The most important aspect of the actions and future vision shown by Mayor Rice, who also expanded Sam Houston Park, was described in a newspaper interview in January 1911 when Rice stated that the ultimate objective was "the establishment of a 'park circle' around Houston, to be accomplished by joining Houston's parks with landscaped parkway boulevards. The courses of Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou would provide the site for this parkway, with a possible link to Heights Boulevard in Houston Heights.' Mayor Rice in his Annual Report for 1912 commended these actions and 'urged future administrations maintain a commitment to park planning and particularly endorsed the idea of acquiring a large park along Buffalo Bayou 'that will for all time be of sufficient magnitude for our people.' Throughout the administration of Rice, he was focused on expanding and developing park space. The city acquired the existing Highland Park, a twenty-six acre pleasure garden near the confluence of White Oak and Little White Oak Bayous, which translated to more park space with bayou frontage. Even the Houston Chamber of Commerce encouraged "modest landscaping gestures that could visually transform the banks of the bayou to publicly commending efforts of private individuals for landscaping the bayous rather than developing them which caused debris and erosion." It was the Houston Daily Post which first promoted the notion of a landscaped, pedestrian promenade along Buffalo Bayou in the early days of Houston. (HAS, Vol. 6)."

"By 1915 the Parks Department estimated that over 200,000 persons visited Sam Houston Park annually, Houston's first park, which had been established in 1899 (City of Houston Protected Landmark, 2007). The former residence of the Kellum and Noble families on the park site was utilized as headquarters for the Parks Department. Reports indicate that the park caretaker lived in the house at one time. The home has also served as a storeroom and public restrooms, and for a short time, contained a historical museum according to the WPA history of Houston."

"In order to provide a substantive basis for redressing this situation, the Board of Park Commissioners in 1912 retained Arthur Coleman Comey, a landscape architect from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to compile a comprehensive park report. The next year, Comey's report was published as 'Houston, Tentative Plans for Its Development.'"" The report revealed that Houston was clearly deficient in park space with a mere acre for every six hundred and eighty-five people, which was considerable higher than found in Kansas City, where one hundred and ten people per acre was the norm. More importantly Comey's report advocated that "the backbone of a park system for Houston will naturally be its bayou or creek valleys, which readily lend themselves to parking (park space) and cannot so advantageously be used for any other purpose" especially since the waterways are natural and are the flood drainage system which is vital to the existence of Houston. Furthermore, he stated "these valleys intersect the city in such a way as to furnish opportunity for parks of unusual value within a comparatively short distance of most of the residential areas." All the bayous should be parked except where utilized for commerce, such as the Houston Ship Channel and Port. He observed that where bayous were

developed privately, they were “sordid and ill-kept, and depressed property values” around them. He further stated that “as publicly-owned parkland they would enhance the economic value of surrounding neighborhoods.” He advised acquisition of bayou property from four to six miles beyond the existing corporate limits. Another segment of the report which “related to Buffalo Bayou was the proposal that Houston establish a civic center in or near the central commercial district where public buildings might be constructed in a harmonious style to achieve monumental effect.” (HAS, Vol. 6)

Comey’s recommendations had their effect. In July 1912 the city acquired property on the north bank of White Oak Bayou from the Southern Pacific Hospital in the Fifth Ward all the way west to the Houston Heights City Limits. Other tracts purchased went west from downtown along Buffalo Bayou to Shepherd’s Dam (Shepherd Drive today). In 1913 Mayor Rice was not re-elected but his successor, Ben Campbell, fully shared Rice’s enthusiasm at least for parks and civic planning. Clarence L. Brock was appointed General Superintendent of City Parks in 1913. Brock also advocated in his annual report in 1912 that a landscape plan needed to be prepared and a system of connecting boulevards constructed between parks. During 1914 important steps were taken toward realizing these recommendations. In May 1914 George H. Hermann gave a 287-acre park site along Brays Bayou to the city for Hermann Park. He also gave additional land to the city including a square block near Sam Houston Park, “a breathing space” later to be called Hermann Square, fronting the existing City Hall (City of Houston Protected Landmark). Another important step was taken at this time in 1914. George E. Kessler, one of the best known landscape architects in the United States, was appointed as a consulting landscape architect by the Board of Park Commissioners. Kessler began the task of implementing as many of Comey’s recommendations as could be afforded by the City of Houston. Many parks in Houston were improved and priority was given to improving neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

It was about this time that the older Sam Houston Park began to fall gradually into disuse as the surrounding residential areas were replaced by commercial establishments. Albert W. Lackey, Brock’s successor, was appointed to further carry out the plans proposed by Comey. In 1916 George Kessler, who had been hired to further implement Comey’s plans, turned his attention to the parks along Buffalo Bayou near downtown, when he proposed a “formal garden in Sam Houston Park, set at the main entrance (East) to the park” at Bagby and Lamar. The formal garden was carried out to coincide with the meeting of the Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists in Houston, and therefore, was referred to as the “Convention Garden.” The other project he proposed was for a site layout for the South Texas Permanent Exposition on the seventy acres along Buffalo Bayou just west of Sam Houston Park that had been acquired by the city in 1916. The tract also included the old golf links tract formerly used by the Houston Golf Club and owned by the William M. Rice Institute. The project was elaborate in scope and called for the re-channeling of the bayou as a straight stream, eliminating three ox-box bends, and Lamar and Dallas Avenues were to be extended through Sam Houston Park, totally changing its character. Moreover, the avenues were to connect to Shipman Street, which was to become a “scenic drive” along the south bank of Buffalo Bayou including the installation of a continuous pedestrian promenade. No part of the South Texas Permanent Exposition project was carried out due to lack of park funds and the United States had just entered into World War I. After the war, lack of funding still plagued the progress for the expanding and improving of park lands. The Chamber of Commerce still advocated in its monthly news magazine the adoption of rational city planning methods and the support for an active parks movement.

Albert W. Lackey purchased his home at 218 Hathaway Avenue, now known as 239 Westheimer Road, on February 21, 1911, in the new, fashionable Avondale Addition. He purchased Lot 18 in Block 10 which included a new two-story house. The purchase price was \$7,500, which was to be repaid in three payments. The seller was the Russell Brown Company, a local Houston and Dallas home builder, that was very active in the

area. The Russell Brown Company supplied the plans, labor and material for new homes that could be built either from existing plans or customized homes built to suit the needs of the client.

Russell Brown (c. 1877-1963) organized the Russell Brown Company in 1908 and remained extremely active in residential construction after World War II. The company was responsible for many of the fine homes in Avondale, including (218 Avondale – City of Houston Protected Landmark), Westmoreland, Courtlandt Place, Montrose, Broadacres, and River Oaks. Real estate advertisements in the Houston Daily Post for June 11 and 18, 1916 noted that they had houses under construction in Rossmoyne, which included the Sterling-Berry House at 4515 Yoakum – City of Houston Landmark. Later, the Russell Brown Company published a catalog of some of their completed projects in 1919, entitled Modern Homes. The Russell Brown Company also constructed the home at 1401 Castlecourt (City of Houston Landmark).

The 239 Westheimer house had been built as a speculative house by the Russell Brown Company. The design was a two-story, wood frame residence with prominent beveled bay windows on the main façade of the second floor. The house is another variation of a home built by the Russell Brown Company in March 1911 at 3518 Garrott Street (City of Houston Westmoreland Historic District). This particular house style bears strong resemblance to one of the George F. Barber designed homes from his 1902 catalog of house designs, entitled Art In Architecture. House Design Number 577, by Barber and Kluttz Architects, was available as complete plans with blueprints for \$37. The Russell Brown design is not an exact duplicate of the Barber and Kluttz design, however. The earlier Barber design features paired, hipped roof dormers on the front and single, hipped roof dormers on each side of the mansard roof. The Russell Brown design incorporates several style departures from the earlier Barber design, the most notable of which is the use of a low hipped roof with one large centered hipped roof dormer. The use of these elements was more in keeping with the Prairie School of architecture that was popular at the time.

Albert Lackey would have been considered “middle class” when he moved to Avondale in 1911. The Greater Houston Improvement Company marketed the new Avondale neighborhood to three tiers of socio-economic groups. Hathaway Street was the least expensive portion of the neighborhood and had the smallest lots at six thousand square feet, still comfortably sized by normal city standards. Homes along Hathaway were required in the deed restrictions to cost no less than three thousand dollars and to have at least a twenty-foot set back from the street. The homes on Avondale, one block north of Hathaway, featured 10,000 square foot or greater lots with homes costing no less than \$5,000 and set back 35 feet from the front property line. Albert Lackey, who lived in the less expensive part of the neighborhood, shared his rear property line with 16 Courtlandt Place, owned by J. J. Carroll, manager of his father-in-law’s lumber company, the W. T. Carter Lumber Company.

W. T. Carter was President of the Greater Houston Improvement Company, which developed Avondale. Courtlandt Place was, at that time, Houston’s most exclusive, residential enclave. Residents along Hathaway in the Avondale subdivision were located directly between two of Houston’s most exclusive residential streets.

The Lackeys lived at 239 Westheimer until 1930, when they sold the home and moved to the Magnolia Park subdivision. The house was next occupied by Edward and Mildred Owens. Edward Owens was an interior decorator when he first purchased the property, but was soon thereafter listed simply as a “paper hanger.” The change in status came shortly after the stock market crash of 1929, which sent the majority of the country into widespread economic depression. Owens’ later occupation was given as farmer and finally “Real Estate.” Edward Owens died in 1942, but his wife Mildred M. Owens continued to live in the house until 1973. At various times, Mildred Owens was a teacher, a writer and editor for the Marion Riddick Film Production Company. In 1967, she became the Executive Secretary and Treasurer for the Houston Christian Mission Lighthouse for Women, with which she was involved for many more years.

The house at 239 Westheimer stayed in the Owens family for many years while many of the other homes in the neighborhood changed hands many times as the neighborhood changed from one of deed-restricted single-family homes to a mix of single-family, commercial, and multifamily occupancy. In 1995, the house became the offices for Suzanne Anderson Properties and was purchased by Suzanne Anderson in 1996. Suzanne Anderson Properties, which began in the early 1980s, has grown to become a well-recognized force in the real estate business with 39 agents in Houston, Galveston, and Austin.

Avondale was one of several upscale "suburban" neighborhoods developed during the first quarter of the 20th century, which included Audubon Place, Courtlandt Place, James Bute Addition, Montrose, and Westmoreland. This area attracted Houston's business and social elite more than a decade before the creation of River Oaks, Houston's undisputed upscale neighborhood. Avondale was first platted in 1907 and derived its name from a variation on the name of William Shakespeare's hometown in England, Stratford-upon-Avon. According to an Art Nouveau-style ad in the May 25, 1907 Houston Daily Post newspaper, the name Avondale was chosen from a publicly advertised naming contest. Nine contestants tied for the \$25 prize, which was increased to \$27 so that the nine winners could split the money evenly. The two major thoroughfares in Avondale were named Avondale and Stratford. Avondale offered many attractive perks to upper echelon Houstonians. All unsightly utility lines and garbage bins were accessed from the alleyways behind every home. The concrete curbs and sidewalks were tinted a pleasing shade of pink so as not to strain the eye in the afternoon sun, and streets were paved with oyster shell. Furthermore, no businesses, boarding houses, or structures costing less than \$5,000 were allowed within the neighborhood. The developers touted it as a "first class neighborhood." The streets were landscaped with a variety of oaks, palms, and camphor trees planted by the fledgling Teas Nursery.

Houston experienced a period of substantial growth after major oil strikes in the early 1900s in nearby East Texas oilfields, including Spindletop, Pelly, and Goose Creek. Cotton also played a major economic role, and was so important to the local economy that a Houston Cotton Exchange was created that tracked the price of cotton like commodities on New York's Wall Street Stock Exchange. Avondale played host to many of the men involved in the oil and cotton business. The neighborhood was close to the downtown business district, but far enough away from the hustle and bustle to accommodate spacious homes, large lawns, and broad streets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The Albert W. Lackey home is a two-story, wood framed, single-family residence. It is designed as a modified American Foursquare, which is two stories in height with equilateral sides and a hipped roof. The house departs from the strict interpretation of the foursquare design, however, through its use of prominent three sided bay windows located on the second story of the main elevation. The home is clad in double drop (tear drop) wood siding and features windows of a multi-light sash over a single pane of glass in both the upper and lower floors. This type of window is also used in a central, hipped roof dormer window on the front elevation facing the street. The house has been used for commercial purposes in recent years, but still maintains its identity, architecturally, as a single-family residence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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Houston Daily Post; April 25, 1918.

Barber, George F., Art In Architecture With The Modern Architectural Designer For Those Who Wish to Build or Beautify Their Homes, S.B. Newman & Co. Knoxville, Tenn. 1902-03

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Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

Harris County Deed Records 1910-1940.

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. Maps, Houston 1925 Vol. 5 p. 544.

Chapman, Betty and G. Randle Pace, "Protected Landmark Designation Application for Sam Houston Park," 2006, City of Houston, Texas

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, and edited by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, and Randy Pace, City of Houston Historic Preservation Officer, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Protected Landmark.

- (a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

S	NA		S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;			

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- ☒ ☐ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- ☐ ☒ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

OR

- ☐ ☒ The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

- ☐ ☒ The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a "contributing structure" in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

OR

- ☐ ☒ The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission accepts the recommendation of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission and recommends to City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Albert W. Lackey House at 239 Westheimer Road.

SITE LOCATION MAP
ALBERT W. LACKEY HOUSE
239 WESTHEIMER ROAD
NOT TO SCALE

